

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board **Spring 2015**



The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana,
an initiative to increase the number of Montana students
who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with schools,
community organizations, businesses and youth.



“Graduation Matters Montana would not be successful without the involvement of the Student Advisory Board members. With the help of my board members, we have set the tone for “student voice” in our state. Their ideas inspired me to implement new and creative efforts that helped our graduation rate increase to 85.4 percent.”

Superintendent Denise Juneau
Student Advisory Board Spring 2015 Summit

Overview

Superintendent Denise Juneau’s 2014 - 2015 Student Advisory Board (SAB) assembled for the spring summit on April 16 & 17, 2015, at Helena College. The theme of the Summit was “Creating a School Culture of Belonging.” SAB members discussed how we can help students feel welcome and safe at school. As Superintendent Juneau stated, “I am always impressed by how brave the board members are, they share personal experiences that have shaped their lives.”

The SAB is comprised of 35 high school students from 30 Montana schools. Members were nominated by local school staff and community members and then completed an application process for selection to the board. Board members in grades 9-12 travelled from rural communities such as Wolf Point and Thompson Falls and from larger communities such as Billings and Great Falls. The SAB reflects the diverse backgrounds, interests, and experiences of Montana students. Overall, the board consists of musicians, athletes, actors, activists, ranchers, and gamers, at risk and honor roll students, and students who dropped out and re-enrolled in high school.



“Creating a School Culture of Belonging” Theme

The social aspect of school is just as important as academic success. Research tells us that students can’t just get good grades and can’t just be social butterflies in order to be successful. Students need both social connections and academic success to stay on track for graduation.



“In a small school, if you aren’t playing sports you stick out. Bigger schools have more club opportunities,”
SAB Member.

National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) Workshop

NCBI is a non-profit organization that helps to create a more just and inclusive society by developing leaders who work to end mistreatment, correct systemic inequalities and strengthen community cohesion. To accomplish that mission, NCBI has developed a leadership development program and comprehensive workshops.

The SAB members participated in one of NCBI’s dynamic workshops. The members talked about the diversity of their school experiences and their individual differences. By sharing their personal stories the students bonded, strengthened their opinions, and developed important leadership skills. The activity was conducted by the Executive Director of NCBI, Heidi Wallace, and three students, Sydnie, Cody and Shay, from Hellgate High School in Missoula.

Discussion with Superintendent Denise Juneau:

At each SAB Summit, the Superintendent asks the board members to respond to a set of critical questions based on the theme of that summit. This summit’s critical questions were:

- 1) We know that a welcoming and inclusive school environment helps more students stay in school. What can be done to help students feel included and safe at school? What has your school done to create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment?

SAB Reflection:

- Board members shared their experiences about transitioning into high school. They often felt lost in a crowd or scared. Board members suggested more schools implement peer mentoring programs to ensure freshmen feel included and safe at school. They believe

peer mentoring programs would help create a less imitating hierarchy between lower and upper class students. The board members who had participated in peer mentoring programs watched the freshman they befriended succeed in school. For the students who were mentees their mentors became a friend to rely on.

- Students want caring adults to participate in extracurricular activities. In schools with limited club options, many adults have encouraged students to start their own clubs. Board members acknowledged that without an adult the club often fails. Students want the help of teachers, administrators, and the community.
- Clubs aren't the only way to improve school climate. Adults and students should share meals to create an inclusive school. At Bridger Alternative in Bozeman, they host a Thanksgiving meal every year. This tradition has united the entire school.



- 2) **We live in a diverse country and world. Many Montana communities do not have access to this diversity. How can schools help expose students to the diversity of ideas, people, and cultures that exist in our state and beyond? How can students create opportunities for their school and community to learn about different cultures and people?**

SAB Reflection:

- SAB members suggested that school boards should reflect the diversity of Montana. Leadership from those boards would promote acceptance of diversity in schools and the community.
- Promote cultural diversity and the diversity that exists in Montana. They believe that Montana has diverse communities but we don't recognize or appreciate it. If more Montanans recognized and appreciated all people, our communities would be stronger.



- Help students open their eyes beyond Montana by offering more foreign exchange programs. If students can't travel then schools should offer field trips that increase a student's global awareness.

Socratic Circle Activity

The Socratic Circle Activity is an approach to discussion that allows students to build off each other's ideas. The purpose of the activity was to gain greater insight into how students felt about three specific topics. Three different groups discussed the different topics: bullying, culture, and social status. This activity helped the board members develop listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills. Below are the ideas the SAB members had about the topics.

Summary of the Conversation on Bullying:

Bullying is about power and control. It is intentional and repetitively hurts a person physically or emotionally. There are many reasons why a person bullies some are obvious and others aren't. Among one of many reasons a bully might want to impress or intimidate their friends. The act of bullying another person helps the bully feel confident and in control of their life.

Summary of the Conversation on Culture:

Culture isn't just based on a person's skin color, language and socio-economic status. It is also based on the traditions that have been handed down through generations. As culture evolves, the values of the traditions often stay the same even if customs are altered. Understanding and being exposed to different cultures helps students see life from a different perspective.



"The best teacher is fun, relatable and passionate about teaching her students,"
SAB Member.

Summary of the Conversation on Social Status:

Understanding the way a person has experienced our culture is important to their story and the way they live their life. These difference have shaped our state. It is important to recognize social status, because perspectives change as more people recognize what it is like to be a minority, woman, adopted, low-income and more.

SAB Final Recommendations

- Students want caring adults to help them succeed in academics and social activities.
- Students want opportunities to learn about their peers and the people who live across the world.
- Students need to be knowledgeable about the various types of people in our global world.
- Student know that understanding cultural diversity opens the door to opportunity.
- Students understand that bullying comes in many different forms and impact the entire school, not just one person.
- Students recognize that Montana has a history and culture of its own. That needs to be recognized and appreciated.
- Students want to combat bullying by implementing prevention programs in elementary school.
- Students want to discuss how the world impacts them and how it impacts their

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members Fall 2015

Andrew Donlan, Ashley Hofland, Bailey Menahan, Blazz Wood, Bristan Fenner, Cassidy Clotfelter, Charlene Allmer, Crystal Lamere, Dylan Haggart, Elijah Kleinsasser, Evangeline Campbell, Gabriella Blatt, Hannah Fradkin, Ian Furstenberg, Ian Kozak, Issac Cowley, Jake Michels, Johnathan Mason, Joseph Martinez, Katelyn Weldon, Lauryn Barnhart, Mackenzie Spence, Naumie DuShane, Paige Holmes, Paige Robertson, Piper Robinson, Sean Swinford, Stephanie Woodland, Sydnie Racine, Taylor Johnson, Trevor Canty, and Tyler Subatch.

